

Preface

A vast homefront construction effort by the U.S. Army undergirded mobilization and combat in World War II. Started by the Quartermaster Corps and carried to completion by the Corps of Engineers, this building program embraced more than 27,000 projects, large and small, and cost \$15.3 billion, roughly \$59 billion in 1970 prices. (See Appendix.) Among its major features were camps and cantonments to house 5.3 million troops; plants to mass-produce explosives, ammunition, tanks, and planes; hospitals providing nearly half a million beds; a huge network of ports and depots; improvements to principal waterways and flood protection for vital industries; bomber bases which entailed a whole new technology; the mammoth Pentagon Building; and facilities for the epochal Manhattan Project. Our book is a history of this undertaking.

It is also a history of people: of military leaders and their staffs; of civilian engineers, contractors, suppliers, and equipment dealers; of dollar-a-year men and expert consultants; of industrialists and union organizers; of statesmen and politicians; of patriots and profiteers; and of the faceless multitude—workers, GI's, small businessmen, dispossessed property owners, and citizens of every stripe who participated in or felt the impact of the program. Throughout we have tried to show how individuals and groups influenced events.

Ostensibly a diffuse technical subject, an untempting prospect for historians, construction proved a rewarding field of inquiry. High-level planning, site selection, land acquisition, engineering design, contractual arrangements, procurement methods, labor relations, and day-to-day operations in the field—all were illuminating studies. Gradually a story emerged of public indifference and military myopia, of unprecedented challenges and initial unpreparedness, of cruel disappointments and serious mistakes, of remedial measures and sweeping reorganizations, and of prodigious efforts and crowning success. Because many World War II developments had their roots in World War I and the two decades that followed, the narrative begins in 1917 and, more or less following a chronological scheme, proceeds through eighteen chapters to August 1945. The final chapters discuss two extraordinary achievements—airfields for heavy bombers and the atomic bomb.

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For the facts presented and the conclusions drawn in this volume, the authors alone are responsible.

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